POL BURY

FOUNTAINS AND OTHER INTRIGUING WORKS

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July 15 - September 11, 1999

Reception for the Artist:
Thursday, July 15, 1999 6 to 10 PM

1999 Absolut L.A. *International Biennial Art Invitational*
In collaboration with
Galerie Louis Carré & Cie, Paris

We invite you to attend the opening receptions of all the West Hollywood Galleries on Saturday, JULY 24, 1999.

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THE INGENIOUS WORLD OF
POL BURY

Pol Bury, like many sculptors, began his career as a painter. Born in Belgium in 1922, he joined the Belgian Surrealist *Groupe recherches surréaliste Rupture* before World War II, and his early paintings are informed by the work of Yves Tanguy and René Magritte. A member of the Belgian Resistance during the war, he resumed painting at war's end and was one of the youngest artists to show at the notable Surrealist exhibition at the Galerie La Boétie in Brussels in 1945. Four years later he met the poet and painter Christian Dotremont, one of the founders of the CoBrA (Copenhagen/Brussels/Amsterdam) group. Bury was attracted to the political stance of this international association of artists, but soon rejected the Expressionist figuration which was an essential aspect of their style. Although he contributed illustrations to the influential *Cobra* publication, his own work became more abstract and he was ready to accept a new concept of art when he saw an exhibition of Alexander Calder at the Galerie Maeght in Paris in 1950. "I immediately felt that a great door was opening to me. I proceeded to make a series of *Mobile Planes,* which were in fact a fusion of my earlier painting and the revelation that the Calder mobiles had given me."[1] The *Mobile Planes* of 1953-54 were painted wooden or metal disks which could be moved by the spectator. The artist felt, however, that audience participation was too much of a game in which the viewer becomes a player and he substituted micro-motors. Some of these works were included in the *Le Mouvement* exhibition at the Galerie Denise René in Paris in 1955. Among the artists in the seminal exhibition of what became to be known as kinetic sculpture were Agam, Calder, Duchamp, Soto and Tinguely.

In 1960, using concealed electric motors, Bury began producing sculptures in which spheres, squares, cubes and cylinders move almost imperceptively on their planes. He used wires, pegs, nails, needles, nylon threads, cork, etc. for these often playful configurations. The viewer may be reminded of organic fauna, like sea anemones, urchins or anthills, but also of schematic ballet dancers, or may see them as commentaries on mass society such as the random movement of people in cities. No such analogies, however, were in the artist's mind. The active elements move or vibrate with deliberate slowness. They may be pondered as optical experiments about the threshold of perception of visible motion. The viewer, not being able to apprehend these kinetic constructions at a glance, must take time to distinguish mobility from immobility. The geometric components of the sculptures are placed ingeniously on straight or sloping planes, on wooden frames or on boards, on top or sides of chests, on pedestals, on slanting shelves or on steps. Some of them are placed on reflecting mirrors. Many emit clattering noises engendered by the motors. Eugéne Ionesco wrote an introduction to Bury's second New York solo show at the Lefebre Gallery in 1966: "Now, watch how this thing moves and that bends; listen to how this grinds, that growls and grunts, listen carefully and watch how it moves, not much, just a little, this one hardly stirs and that one stops and this one starts again."[2]

Pol Bury represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale in 1964 and he also exhibited at Dokumenta III in Kassel, where I, as the American commissioner of the show, first encountered his work and was immediately captivated by its ingenuity. Two years later he was featured in the first international exhibition of kinetic sculpture in the U.S. at the University Art Museum in Berkeley. This was followed by his first retrospective exhibition in 1970. After it opened at Berkeley, the show traveled to Minneapolis, Iowa City, Chicago, Houston and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, acquainting the American public with the work of this kinetic sculptor.

In the mid-sixites Bury substituted metal for wood as his material of choice. The reflecting quality of stainless steel, polished copper or brass creates the illusion of mirror images in these pieces. They are less mysterious and more precise than the wooden sculptures. By his use of electro-magnets Bury was able to liberate his balls and cubes from their wires, allowing them to move freely without their attachment being visible. He continued to work in wood and his first important public commission, *4087 Cylinders erectiles* (1971/72) for the Musée National d'Art Moderne–Centre Pompidou, was made of black painted oak with over 4000 light beech cylinders spread in clusters on their vertical support. Bury's later pieces juxtapose spheres with squares or locate small balls in perspective volumes. More recently he has placed squares of copper into tall sinuous structures of elegant curvature. Or, using paper, he makes collages in expanding or contracting patterns, evoking schemata of natural forms.

In 1969 Bury constructed his first of many fountains, *Fontaine cinetique,* commissioned by the University of Iowa. Here two semi-circular arches spray fine jets of water on curving metal bands below. Beginning in 1976 his fountains were operated by hydraulic pressure. Most of them, both for indoor and outdoor installation, are configurations of linear pipes or of spheres. They are fabricated from corten steel. Among his important commissions were the fountain for the atrium of the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York (1980) and the fabulous fountain made for the Governor's Palace in Antwerp (1981). In 1986 Pol Bury, who had been appointed Professor at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris to teach Monumental Sculpture, was commissioned by Jacques Lang, President Mitterand's Minister of Culture, to place two large fountains on the Cour d'Orleans, the very heart of the patrimony of France. Here the stainless steel globes are set on hexagonal disks and the water is pumped from below the spheres, spilling across the plateaus into square basins. The weight of the water causes the globes to oscillate seemingly at random on their aqueous level, thus giving the appearance of levitation.

With original ingenuity Pol Bury proceeded from tableaux of slowness to fountains in which the temporal remains essential. Combining fantasy with a sense of structure he makes sculptures which signify movement, demonstrating the link between time and space.

PETER SELZ

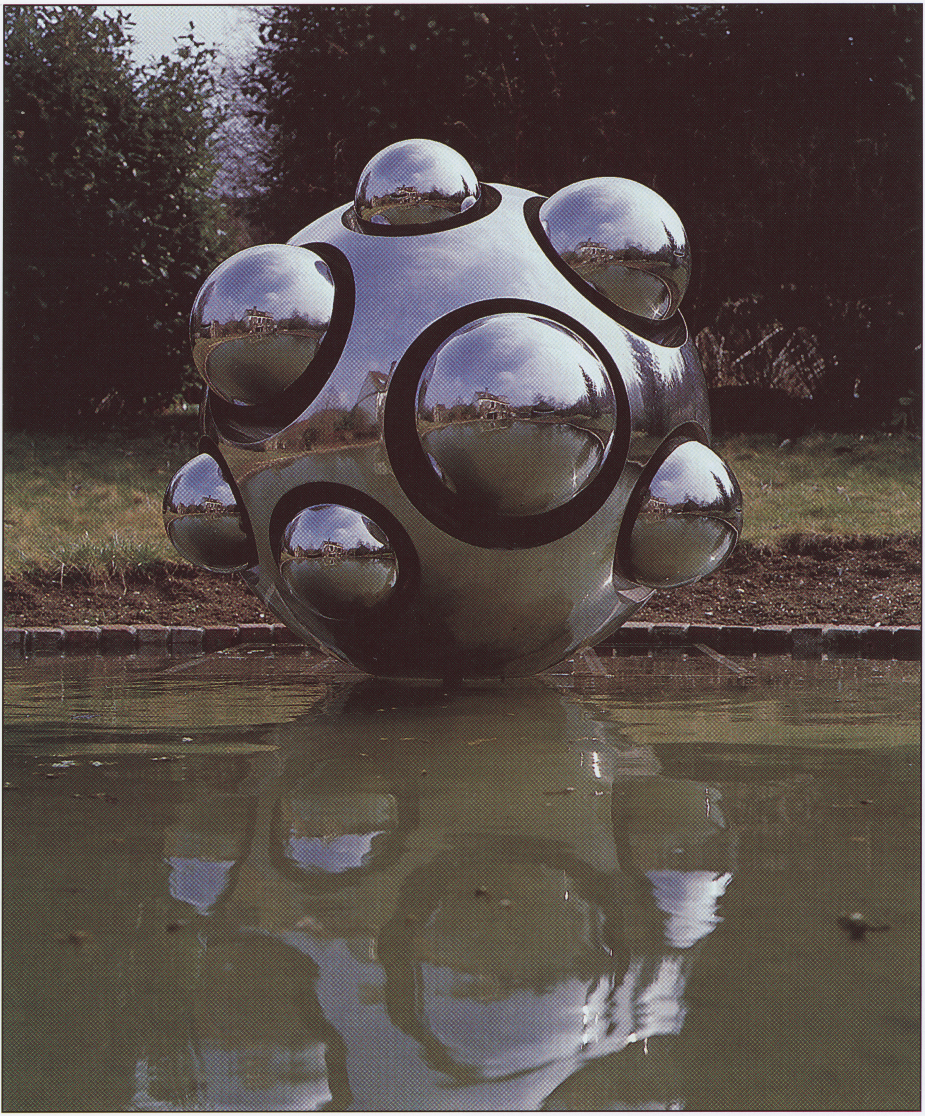
Notes

1 Pol Bury, Interview with Peter Selz, "Pol Bury" (Berkeley, University Art Museum, 1970), p. 4.

2 Eugéne Ionesco, "Pol Bury" (New York, Lefebre Gallery, 1966), N.P.

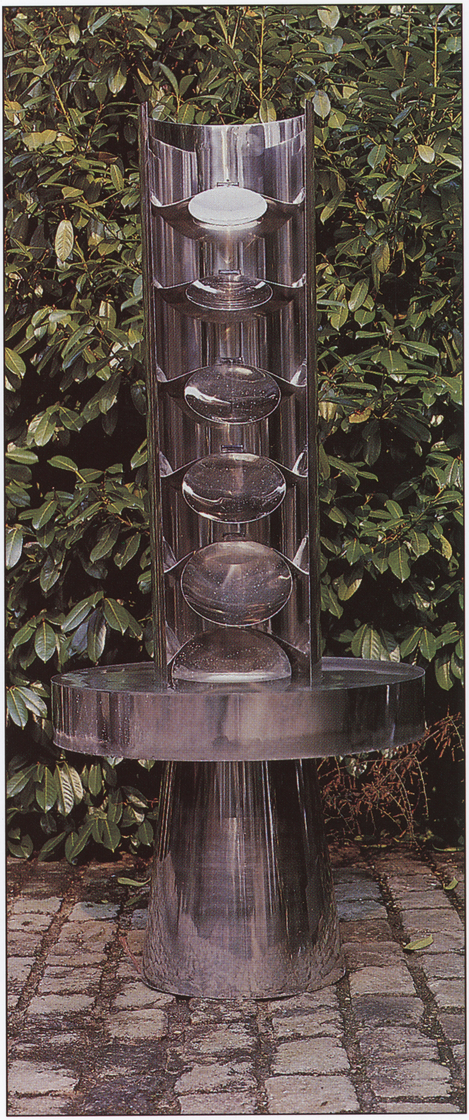
SEPT SPHÈRES DANS UNE DEMI-SPHÈRE
1987

stainless steel
70⅞ x 61 x 35⁷⁄₁₆ inches
180 x 155 x 90 centimeters



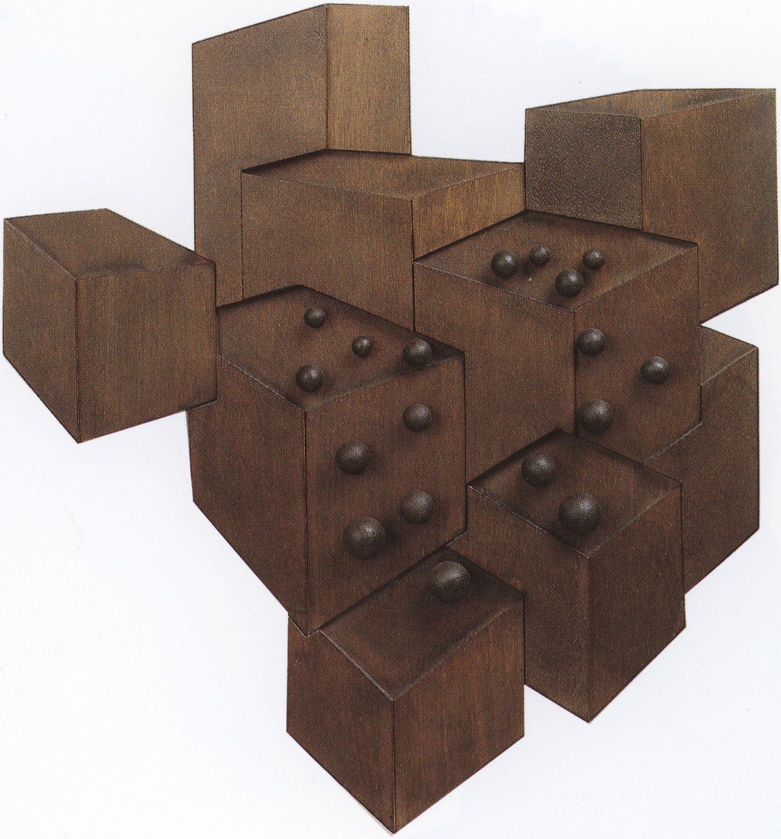
SIX VASQUES SUPERPOSÉES
1985

polished steel
$82\frac{11}{16}$ inches
210 centimeters



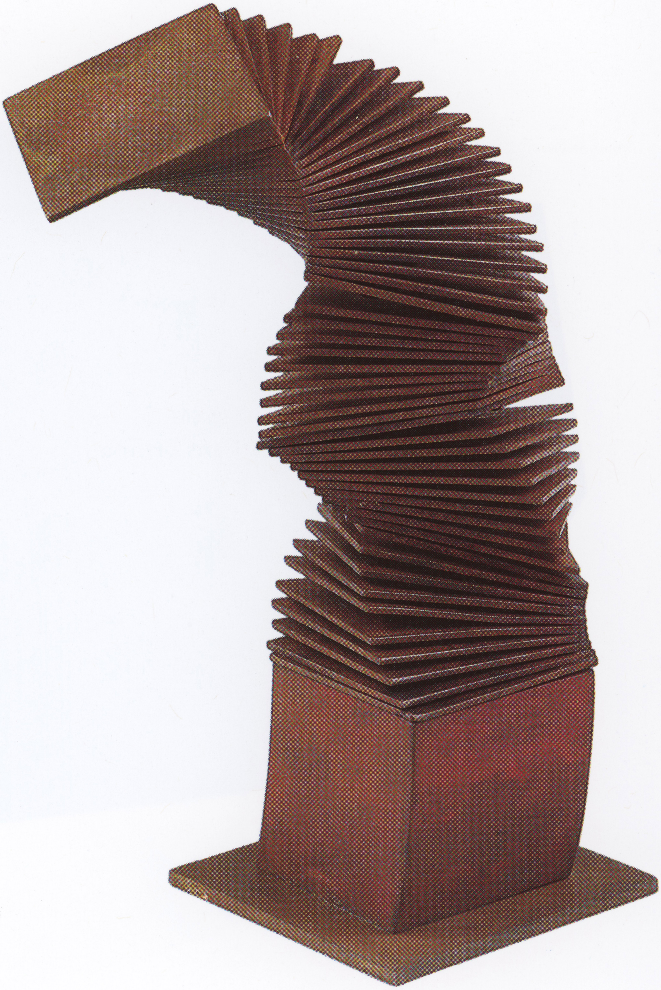
18 BOULES, 9 VOLUMES
1997

wood
23⅝ x 21⅝ x 5⅞ inches
65 x 55 x 15 centimeters



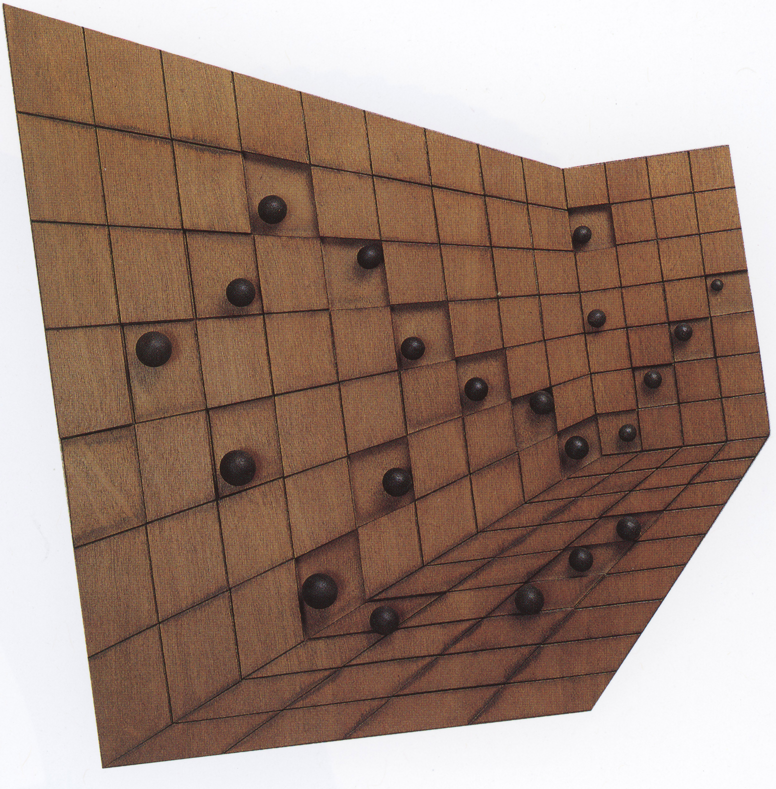
VOLUME FIGÉ
1993–96

copper
9⅞ x 5⅛ x 5⅛ inches
23 x 13 x 13 centimeters
edition number ⅜



21 BOULES SUR 3 PLANS
1997

wood
23⅝ x 26⅜ x 5⅞ inches
60 x 67 x 15 centimeters

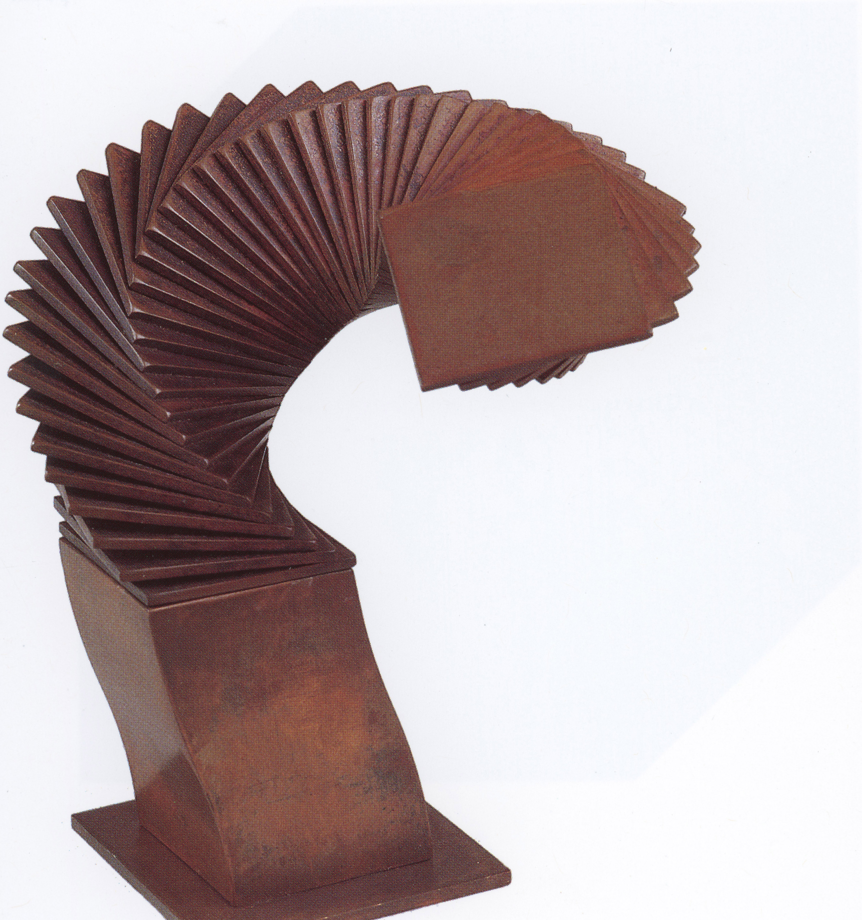


14:15

VOLUME FIGÉ

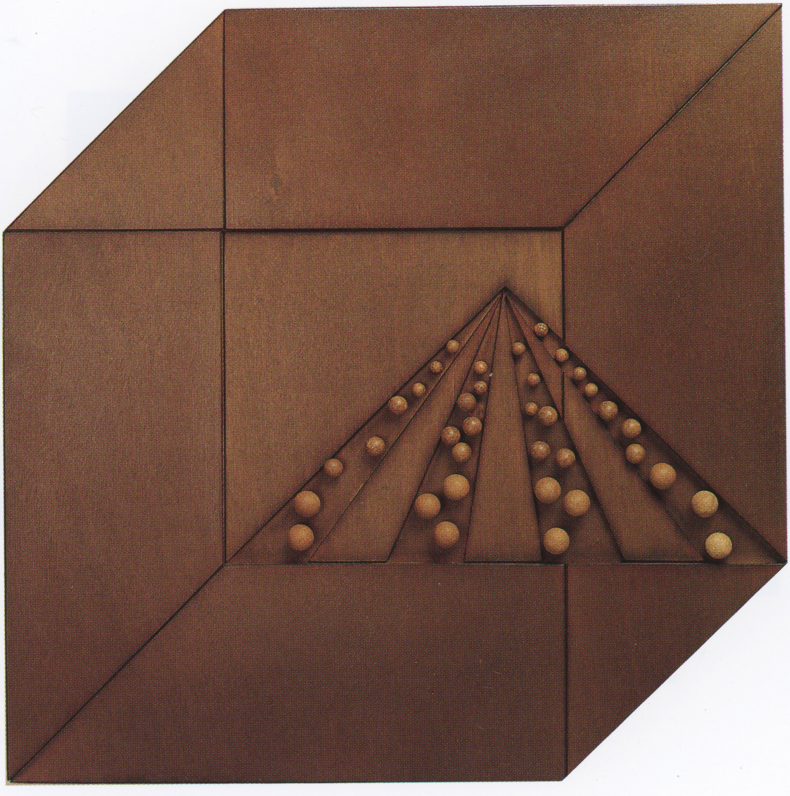
1993–96

copper
7½ x 7 1/16 x 7 1/16 inches
19 x 18 x 18 centimeters
edition number 4/8



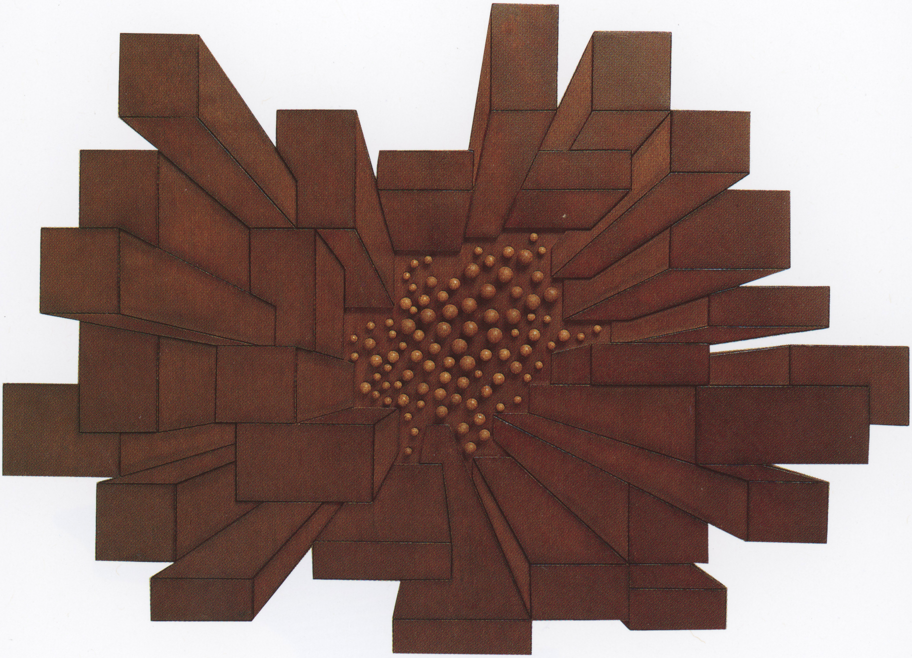
36 BOULES DANS UN CUBE EN PERSPECTIVE
1997

wood
23⅝ x 23⅝ x 5⅞ inches
60 x 60 x 15 centimeters



PERSPECTIVE AVEC 27 VOLUMES ET 92 BOULES,
1997

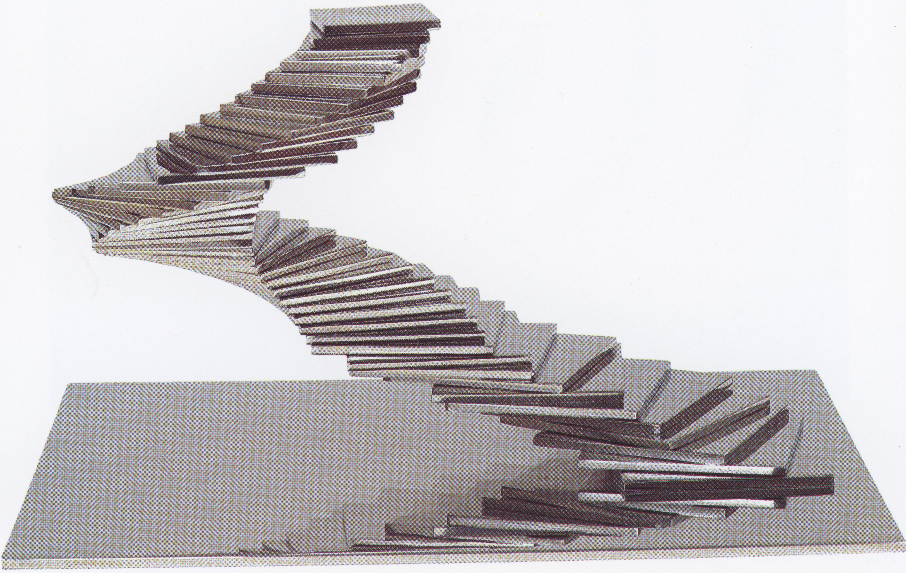
wood
$45\frac{1}{4}$ x $33\frac{1}{16}$ x $5\frac{7}{8}$ inches
115 x 84 x 15 centimeters



VOLUME MIROIR

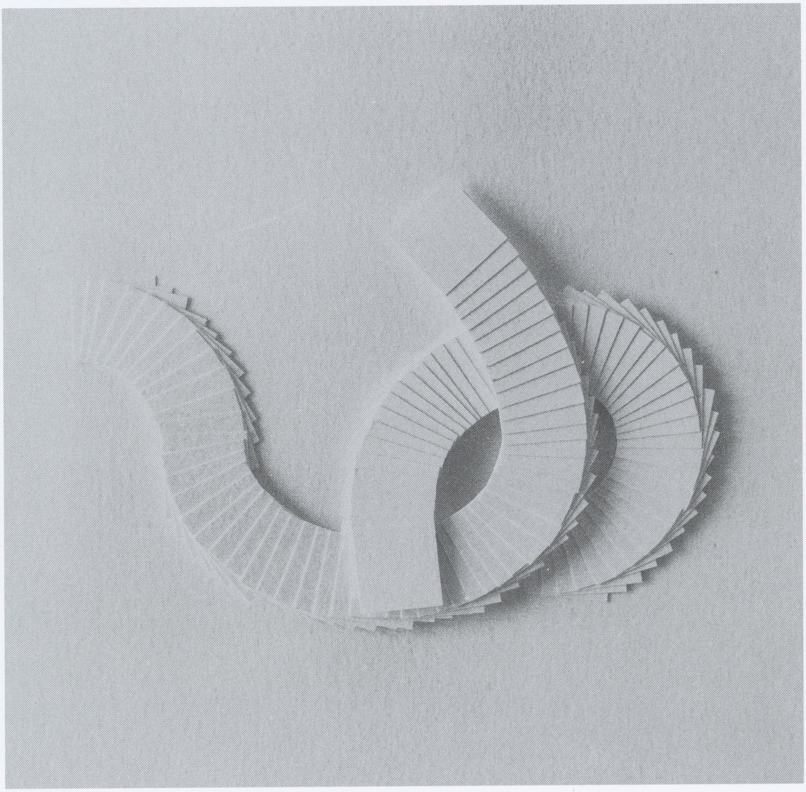
1993–96

steel
9 1/16 x 15 3/4 x 11 3/16 inches
23 x 40 x 30 centimeters



PAPIERS COLLÉS (1–10)
1996

paper collage
$11\frac{13}{16}$ x $11\frac{13}{16}$ inches
30 x 30 centimeters



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*

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